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978-1-107-02484-7 - Against Autonomy: Justifying Coercive Paternalism

Sarah Conly

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## AGAINST AUTONOMY

Since Mill's seminal work *On Liberty*, philosophers and political theorists have accepted that we should respect the decisions of individual agents when those decisions affect no one other than themselves. Indeed, to respect autonomy is often understood to be the chief way to bear witness to the intrinsic value of persons. In this book, Sarah Conly rejects the idea of autonomy as inviolable. Drawing on sources from behavioral economics and social psychology, she argues that we are so often irrational in making our decisions that our autonomous choices often undercut the achievement of our own goals. Thus in many cases, it would advance our goals more effectively if government were to prevent us from acting in accordance with our decisions. Her argument challenges widely held views of moral agency, democratic values, and the public/private distinction, and will interest readers in ethics, political philosophy, political theory, and philosophy of law.

SARAH CONLY is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine.

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107024847](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107024847)

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First published 2013

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Conly, Sarah, author.

Against autonomy : justifying coercive paternalism / Sarah Conly.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-107-02484-7 (Hardback)

1. Decision making – Political aspects. 2. Decision making – Philosophy.
3. Paternalism. 4. Autonomy (Philosophy) 5. Choice (Psychology) 1. Title.

JA71.C575 2012

320.01–dc23

2012021094

ISBN 978-1-107-02484-7 Hardback

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*And certainly, the mistakes we male and female mortals  
make when we have our own way might fairly raise some  
wonder why we are so fond of it.*

*George Eliot, Middlemarch  
(Dirigo Publishing, 1898), Part 1, chapter 9, page 74*

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## *Acknowledgements*

I would like to thank the Harvard University Safra Center for Ethics for its support during my fellowship year, 2006/7, when I began the research for this book; and also the University of St. Andrews Centre for Ethics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs for its support during 2010. I am indebted to faculty and fellows at both institutions for their discussions of the issues discussed in this book. I would like to thank Bowdoin College for sabbatical support during 2010/11, without which this book could not have been written. In a more personal sense, I would like to thank Corey Brettschneider, Martha Nussbaum, and Charlotte Witt for their invaluable encouragement. I doubt that any of them agrees with the content of this book, but they were willing to help me despite that fact, and I appreciate it.